

## The Little Engine House that Could

By TONY KELSO

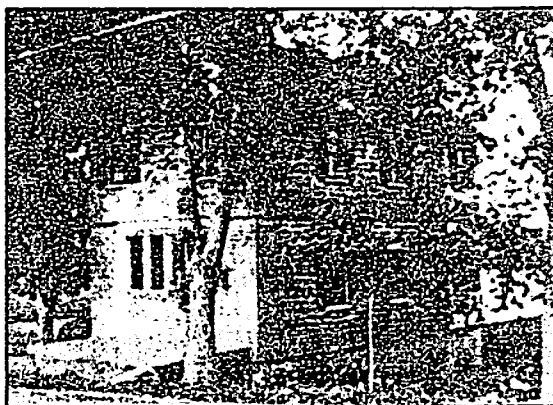
The Bluefish River Fire Station is approaching its one hundred year anniversary in 2006. This diminutive Duxbury firehouse was originally known as Engine Company #1, and its history is a glimpse into early fire fighting and the town politics that swirled around the need to help residents prevent devastating fires.

The March 1906 Annual Town Meeting voted into existence the board of fire engineers, a group of men who were to create fire companies in various parts of Duxbury and gave them \$1,500 and the authority to organize and find ways to house the town fire engines. Frederick Knapp, head of the Powder Point School, was the main organizer and chief proponent of the Fire Engineers. His interest in fire protection was sparked, so to speak, by the loss of the original Weston house, which had stood next to the King Caesar house and which burned soon after

his purchase of the property in 1886.

The Fire Engineers quickly organized two companies of 20 men, each company with a captain who was responsible

for the two fire engines. Fifty feet of hose was bought as well as a harness and traces for the horses, since in 1906 the fire engines were still horse drawn. These engines had been bought the year before for about \$600 each, but the town then belatedly realized that no board had jurisdiction over them.



Engine Company #1 fire house after its move to the Bluefish River area.

*Photo courtesy of DR&HS*

**Names  
& Places**

In 1906 the Wright family gave the town extra land on St. George Street next to the original wooden town library, which stood on the same site as the Wright building does today. It was there Engine Company #1 firehouse was built in the summer of 1906 for \$400 by J. Dexter Randall, a builder from West Duxbury, according to town report records.

Six months later in November, controversy erupted over the location of the new engine house and why the Fire Engineers put it next to the town library. A special town meeting was called, a vote was taken to rescind the original March vote to give the Fire Engineers full authority in locating fire houses, point of order was demanded because this issue was not on the warrant, and the meeting ended with finger pointing and bruised feelings.

Reading between the lines and having the ability to see what happened later, it is probably the case that the Wright family were unhappily surprised to see the new engine house built on the land they recently donated. They were clearly finalizing their plans to offer to Duxbury a substantial new library building (the Wright building). The firehouse built by the town was a roadblock to these plans.

The fiery tempers cooled down enough by April 1907 when the Wright family formally made their generous gift to the town of a new library building as well as the offer to move the wooden library building off the site to a new location for town offices. That left little Engine House #1 out standing in a field by itself.

But the boys of Engine Company #1 were not idle in 1907. The records show they fought 10 fires in 1907: 3 house fires, 3 grass fires threatening buildings and 4 forest fires. Equally important were the social events of Engine Company #1. Record books recently donated to the Duxbury Room of the Duxbury Library by the fire department show a swirl of social occasions organized by the firemen. The entertainment committee had clam chowder suppers with Engine Company #2 in Hall's Corner, Mr. Flood and his "talking machine" offering a pleasant evening, Poverty Balls and minstrel shows held, and a "play out" competition of hoses against Engine #2 held in the stream bed of Millbrook. This was puzzling until you realize there was no town water as of yet in 1907.

The brick walls of the Wright building were beginning to rise up over little Engine House #1 in March 1908 when the Annual Town Meeting agreed to pay to move the fire house to the Bluefish River. First a vote had to be taken to remove the restriction on buildings on rown landings and then \$450 was spent to purchase the "Killian lot" that the building was to sit on.

Eden Soule and Henry Delano for \$228.25 moved the building a week after town meeting. Although building-moving was common in 1908, it must have been a sight to see the horse teams on that early March day with little Engine House #1 riding high, making their slow progress down St. George Street around the Cable house and assorted buildings that cluttered the Liberty flagpole corner over the Bluefish River bridge to its new home. Engine House #1 settled in to begin a new life as a focal point for the Bluefish River neighborhood.

*The Friends of the Bluefish River Fire House is ready to begin fund raising to restore the fire house . Donations may be sent to: Friends of the Bluefish River Firehouse PO Box 1180 Duxbury, MA 02331*